

What Did You Do At Work Today? by W. Scott Cameron



W. Scott Cameron

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I am blessed to be the father of nine-year-old triplet daughters. As you might imagine, there are unique aspects to this blessing. When I come home at night each girl usually asks me what I did at work that day. Thus, I have the opportunity to answer this question about 650 times a year!

To be truthful, this is a hard question to answer because most of what I do at work involves either sitting in other people's meetings or running project meetings. How do you explain a meeting to a nine year old?

Their question, however, got me thinking about what goes on during these meetings and how effectively they are managed. Since I believe a core competency of project management is to run highly effective meetings, I sat back and evaluated some of the meetings I recently attended or ran and came away with the following observations.

Why Am I Here?

Even though there were written agendas listing the topics to be covered, about 75% of the meetings I attended and/or ran had no stated meeting purpose nor shared expectations of what the meeting was supposed to accomplish.

Why Aren't We Starting or Ending on Time?

About 90% of the time, meetings started and ended later than scheduled. People did not expect the meeting to start on time and offered no excuses on why they were late. About half the time the meeting manager stopped the meeting to bring the late arrivals "up to speed," thus penalizing those who arrived on time.

Why is Multi-tasking so Popular?

I've concluded about 20% of meeting time is effectively used by all participants. Thus, the remaining 80% is available for meeting participants to use as they see fit. I observe more and more people multi-tasking in meetings, and in

fact the meeting rooms are now being designed to allow people the opportunity to "plug in their computers" and multi-task to their heart's content.

Are meetings not hitting their mark, or is multi-tasking during meetings the future norm? I've also noted when there is a hierarchical review meeting or presentation the percentage of people multi-tasking during the meeting is greatly reduced. Is this a coincidence?

What Have I Resolved to Do?

These observations have caused me to revisit my trusty meeting management handbook and dust off some old habits to better manage my own meetings.



At my meetings I will:

- Start and finish on time. If someone is late, the others won't be penalized.
- Send meeting agendas and pre-work out two days prior to the meeting and expect people to have read it prior to the meeting.
- Encourage multi-tasking during the meeting but manage meeting "flow" so the individuals will not want to multi-task.
- Limit meetings to a maximum of two hours. I will also modify the agenda to ensure the topics can be covered in the allotted time.

In meetings I attend I will:

- Arrive and depart at the stated times.
- Demand an agenda and pre-work be issued prior to the agenda. Multi- until the meeting requires my full attention.

These changes should allow me more time to answer and ponder the next question my daughters ask me 650 times.

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